



4-1-2017

## Stars

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### Recommended Citation

Colombo, Ashley (2017) "Stars," *Calliope*: Vol. 48 , Article 16.

Available at: <https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/calliope/vol48/iss1/16>

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# STARS

ASHLEY COLOMBO

You've always belonged to the stars.

When you were young, your mother wove them into your dreams, told you bedtime stories of space and galaxies sprinkled in fairy dust. If you tried hard enough, she said, you could catch them—one by one, little flecks of light to keep in your back pocket. Just in case.

You were too small then to reach them, so you stuck plastic ones to your bedroom ceiling instead. They helped dull the ache, for a little while. Gave you hope.

Sometimes you liked to pretend the sky was the ocean—like it was no farther away than your family's favorite beach. You knew the ocean. You'd seen the stars tumble into it, seen them play on the crests of waves while the moon looked on, right at home among them. One jump and you could've joined them, swept away in those sparkling tides.

You devoted your life to those stars. Days only existed to help you find ways to reach them at night. You wanted to know the secrets they held, and to share your secrets with them.

But stars are unpredictable.

They change.

You could never tell from Earth that each star was already dying—a life on its way to burning out forever.

Now that you've caught them, they're slipping right through your fingers.

You try to hold onto them. There has to be one you can keep with you, one that'll keep you company as you drift through space. One that'll save you from losing yourself.

Earth seems so much smaller from here.

You wonder if your mother worries about where you've gone.

You belong to the stars.

But they were never your home.